

February 27, 2023

To the members of the Housing Committee,

We are longtime state residents, residing in the lovely little town of Bethel, CT for the last 36 years. We are writing to express our support for HB5326.

Statute 8-30g has opened our town up to predatory developers, who are using it to circumvent our Planning & Zoning regulations, to build over-sized multi-unit complexes which they claim will include some low-income “affordable” housing. It is debatable, given the prices on new-construction apartments and homes in our town, that these new housing units will actually be “affordable”. We would encourage opening up the categories of what constitutes “affordable housing”, to include existing lower priced rental and homes even if they are not deed-restricted or government-subsidized units. These market-priced low-cost existing homes and apartments should be taken into consideration in order to capture a truer picture of housing affordability in all towns, and here in Bethel. Municipalities like Bethel provide services to everyone in their community, regardless of whether they are in government-subsidized housing or naturally affordable housing, so municipalities like ours should receive credit for all such residents under the 8-30g 10% calculation. We would also encourage the Housing Committee and the CGA to pass legislation that would reduce the “affordable housing” goal of 10% down to 5% for towns like Bethel that are small and mostly built out already. Allowing towns like Bethel to count naturally occurring affordable housing will help achieve that goal.

This bill appears to also increase municipal control by removing the deadline for opt out of the “as of right” accessory apartment requirements, with which we agree.

The infrastructure of Bethel is being very adversely impacted as predatory developers continue to use 8-30g to push through their projects, overriding our local Planning & Zoning Commission. Just in the last week, as we go through our budget process for the upcoming fiscal year, our police department has noted that more officers need to be hired to combat increasing crime in our town, our school system is becoming overwhelmed with new students from recent multi-unit apartment and housing projects, and our traffic has drastically increased, causing safety issues in addition to inconvenience. And ironically, in one Bethel neighborhood which is under attack by developers looking to build huge multi-unit apartment complexes, the lawyer for one applicant admitted at a P & Z public hearing that the neighborhood would indeed be destroyed, although “not right away” - it is ironic because this neighborhood has one of the highest single-family home occupancy by minority families in town!

Every town in Connecticut has its own distinct character, as Bethel does. Different people like living in different environments - many people enjoy living in faster paced cities. Those of us who have made Bethel our homes have chosen it exactly because it is a town, NOT a city, and we want to live lives that are less stressful than city life, as stress adversely affects people. "One size fits all" legislation is not called for, and actually is immoral, as people's physical and emotional health will be negatively impacted.

We also understand that HB 5785, which is under consideration, will expand the number of units qualifying for the calculation of an affordable housing appeals moratorium - we would encourage this Committee and the Legislature to pass such legislation.

Thank you for your consideration - please pass HB5326 and other similar legislation that will modify 8-30g and help municipalities like Bethel who have existing affordable housing stock, but need to have it recognized by the state.

Sincerely,
Julie & Ronald Sorcek
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